



● **Habitat:** Semi-arid hilly country, sparse deciduous forests, near cropland, ancient groves, ruins, often near human habitation and water bodies. Avoid dense forests.

● **Distribution:** From SE Iran, through Aghanistan and India up to NE Indian states and Bangladesh. Up to 1400 m in the Himalayas. Race *A.b. indica* occurs north of 20 degree

latitude and race *A.b.brama* occurs south of 20 degrees latitude.

● **Status:** Resident. Common.

Food (Some food items are depicted below)



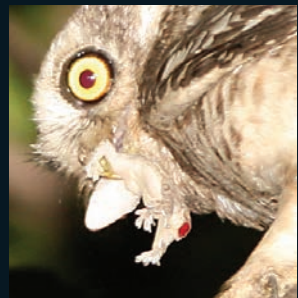
Cockroach species.



Callotes species.



Caterpillar species.



House Gecko - minus tail!



Moth species.



Earth worm species.

Insects, worms, molluscs, crabs, arachnids (scorpions, etc.), lizards, geckos, frogs, rodents, shrews, bats and birds. They often hunt near light source from lamp posts during the night. Prey is swallowed whole and the pellets containing hair, feathers, bones and scales are expelled after 24 to 36 hours.



Field mouse.

Key Features:

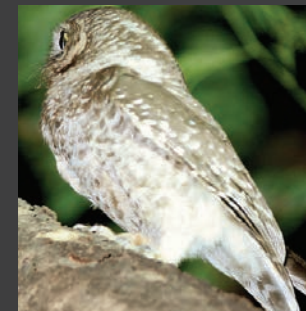
- Crown spotted.
- Rounded prominent head lacks tufts.
- Iris golden yellow.
- Bill horny, greenish;
- Cere greenish brown-dusky.
- Feet yellowish greenish. Soles pale.



Forward facing eyes.



Female is larger than the male.



Flat facial disc in side view.

- Talons dark.
- Greyish brown overall; Pale below.
- Rounded wings.
- Barred tail.



Pattern on the upper wing.

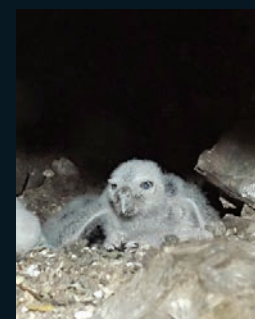


Pattern on the under wing.

Breeding phenology:



Eggs - white, ovoid.



Chicks of 3 days.



1.5 weeks.



3 weeks.



3.5 weeks.



4 weeks.



4.5 weeks.



Cultural Aspects:



The owl was depicted on the coin of Menander (135 BC). It also features on postal stamps. In India, the time of dusk when the owlets become active is called *Pingala Vel* – The time of the owl, in Marathi language.

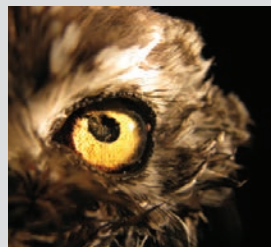
Nest Sites:



Nests are seen in natural tree hollows, crevices in ruins, holes in walls, gaps under roofs or in hollows in earth cuttings; This is a highly adaptive species. Nests is sparsely lined with grass, sticks, etc. Mynas and parakeets compete for the same nest sites.

- **Behaviour:** Nocturnal and crepuscular, but also hunt during day. Keep in pairs or family groups of 4 to 5 in crevices, hollows or amidst foliage. Guard territory all the year. Have a funny habit of bobbing head and rotating it in a curious and clownish manner. Flight is undulating. Tolerate human presence.

● **Etymology:** *Athene* (Gr.), from Pallas Athene, the Greek goddess of wisdom; *brama* (L.), a Latinized version of Brahma - the Hindu god of creation, because it was first described to science from Pondicherry in India. Hence, in the name of this owl, we see amalgamation of two rich ancient cultures - Greek and Indian!



Fungal infection of the eye impairs vision.



At night, the owls hunt near a source of light making them vulnerable to electrocution.

● **THREATS:** Habitat loss. Tree felling has negative effect on the hollow nesting owlets. Agricultural pesticides can reduce prey base and enter the food chain. Electrocution and hunting are other risks. We have recorded an instance where the owl was preyed upon by the Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*.

● **Conservation:** Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act. Nest boxes can be deployed and are accepted by the adaptive owlets. Education of people to convey the effective insect and pest controlling role of these owlets can go a long way towards their conservation.



Owlet entering a nest box with two eggs inside.



Owl depicted as vehicle of goddess Laxmi.

FACT FILE: Spotted Owlet

Athene brama (Temminck, 1821). Type locality: Pondicherry and west coast of India.

Pingla (Marathi); **Ulloo** (Hindi); **Malpatar; Goobe** (Kannada); **Pagadigante** (Telugu); **Pulli andai** (Tamil).

- **Size:** 21 cm.
- **Weight:** 240 g.
- **Wing:** Male – 141 -158 cm; Female – 151 -157 cm.
- **Breeding season:** January to March.
- **Clutch:** 1 – 4 eggs per year (rarely 5).
- **Egg:** White, roundish-ovoid. 32.2 x 27.1 mm (Baker). 10 – 13 g.
- **Incubation:** 31 - 32 d. By both, mainly by female.
- **Fledging:** 31-32 d.
- **Fledging success:** 72.7 % (1.6 chicks).
- **Post-fledging dependence:** 8 months.
- **Call:** Loudly vocal at dawn and dusk more when breeding, even during the day. Contact and territorial calls are harsh chuckles, screeches and hisses. *Chirrr, churr, chirrr, cheewak, chweeek, churr.*



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- **Inputs on Kannada names:** Dr. Mandakini Vartak.
- **Design:** Kiran Velhankar, MediaNext Infoprocessors Pvt. Ltd.
- **Copyright and Published by:** Ela Foundation, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411009. March, 2013. An OENSL initiative. www.elafoundation.org.
- **References:** *Ali & Ripley (1969). *Satish Pande. (2010) Latin Names of Indian Birds Explained. Book made and Funded by Ela Foundation. Published by Published by Oxford University Press and Bombay Natural History Society. *Pande Satish, et al (2011) ZooKeys 132: 75–88. doi: 10.3897/zookeys.132.1346. * Pande Satish et al. (2007). J Raptor Research 41 (1): 26-33.
- **Recommended citation:** Pande, Satish (2013). Spotted Owlet. Ela File 5: 1-6. Ela Foundation, Pune.

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Spotted Owlet

- **Order:** Strigiiformes
- **Family:** Strigidae
- **Status:** Resident

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Ela File 05

Economic Importance

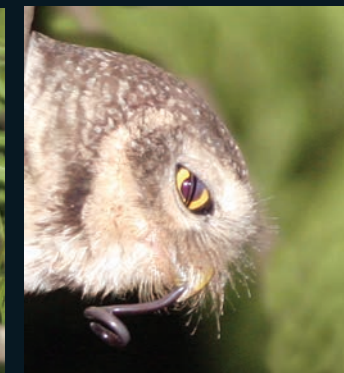


Spotted Owlets eat atleast 7 orders of insects, including grub and caterpillars; atleast 7 species of scorpions, three species of *Galeodes* species and 11 species of rodents that are categorized as crop pests. The beneficial agro-economic role that the owls play in our lives is aptly depicted in the traditional Warli painting above, where the owl is shown perching on a tree waiting for an opportunity to prey upon a rodent that is eating grain.

Amazing Facts



The Spotted Owlet is capable of rotating the head at an amazing speed, as if like a top!



Hunt prey like earthworms that they swallow like noodles!

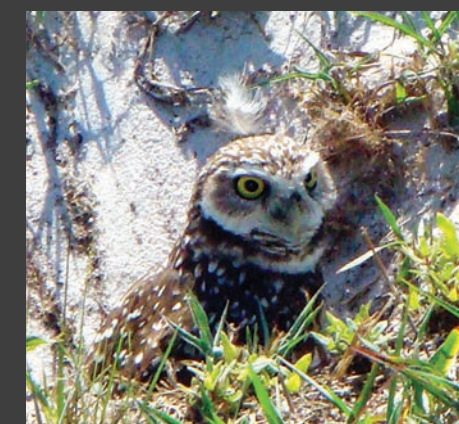


Intermittently close the eyes as precautionary measure while handling prey like rodents.

Related Species



Little Owl *Athene noctua*.



Burrowing Owl *Athene cunicularia*.



Athene brama indica - a northern race.



Barred Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*.

Dr. Satish Pande, Dr. Murlidhar Mahajan, Kumar Pawar, Amit Pawashe and Prashant Deshpande did field research for over 10 years. An OENSL initiative.